

They hit the beaches without
a hope of success.

U. S. agencies had bungled
the entire operation.

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story of incredible
mismanagement that led to
disaster in

CUBA

ANATOMY OF A FAILURE

Arthur Bryant

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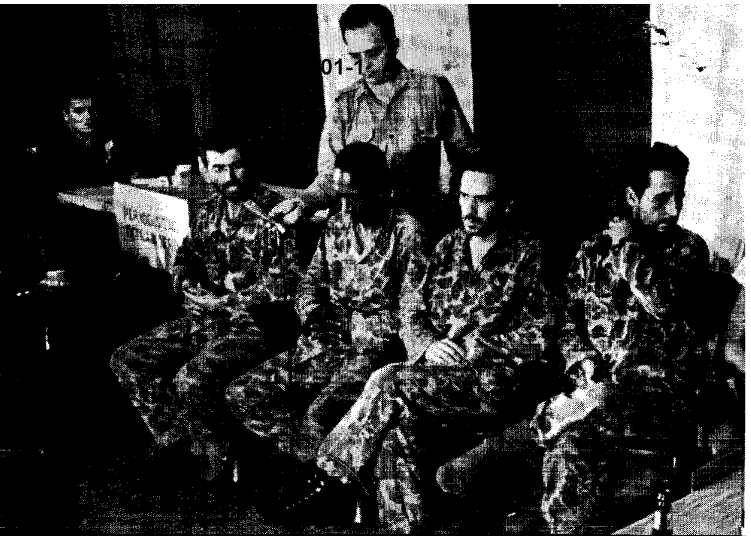


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CIA



By TAD SZULC

The author was for five years South American correspondent of the New York Times. He has recently been transferred to the Washington bureau, where he is diplomatic correspondent for Latin-American affairs.

THE tragedy of the Bay of Pigs—the weird and dramatic 72 hours last April when a miniature army of Cuban rebels senselessly hurled itself against dictator Fidel Castro's heavily armed fortress—deserves a unique place in the annals of military and intelligence disasters.

World War II proved that even the most carefully planned and executed landing operation may end in shocking failure. But the anti-Castro invasion was doomed from the beginning by misleading intelligence reports, faulty planning, disregard for the political realities and astonishing ignorance of subversion procedures. Disobedience of orders—including one from President John F. Kennedy—and outright deceit added to the confusion and insured defeat.

The CIA field agents who planned the invasion kept their superiors in the dark about many aspects of their handiwork. The incredible mismanagement of these agents during the months of feverish preparations for the landing in Cuba has never before been completely revealed.

The basic error was made early. The Central Intelligence Agency estimated that an attack by 1,300 men would cause the instant collapse of a Communist police state defended by 300,000 troops. On the strength of this estimate, the U. S. gave full approval to the operation. Yet, while approving this foolhardy plan, the CIA allowed the destruction of a promising guerrilla movement inside Cuba which might have succeeded in overthrowing Castro.

As preparations for the invasion began, at least 100 Castro spies circulated freely in the build-up area in Florida. Their photographs were on file in the Dade County Sheriff's office, but no effort was made by Federal authorities to remove them from the scene, or to conceal the movements of the anti-Castro fighters from these informers.

While the Castro spies operated freely, two Federal agencies detained groups of anti-Castro revolutionaries. The Federal Communications Commission impounded a rebel boat which broadcast anti-Castro propaganda, and requested the indictment of the boat's operators for broadcasting without a license. And a boat carrying explosives for the Cuban underground was captured off Tallahassee by a Fish and Wildlife Service patrol boat.

Perhaps this failure to inform other Federal agencies of U. S. aid to the anti-Castro Cubans was motivated by security. If so, this was one of the few instances of security during the months of preparation. Many Cuban waiters in Miami could give the names of the CIA agents in charge of the operation, and the Cuban rebel chiefs blandly advised newsmen to "clear it with the CIA" when they sought permission to accompany the troops.

In short, the Cuban invasion of April 17 never had a serious chance of success. It should not have happened. Experienced Cuban leaders had predicted a fiasco weeks before the attack was launched. But this march toward catastrophe won the specific military endorsement of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the approval of most top White House and State Department political experts. On the basis of such recommendations, President Kennedy gave the orders for the doomed invasion to proceed.

Yet there is massive evidence indicating that neither the President nor the Joint Chiefs of Staff—nor possibly even CIA Director Allen W. Dulles—was fully aware at any time of the details of the plans being carried out by their subordinates in Florida, Louisiana, Central America and the Caribbean. These details made the difference between possible success and certain disaster.

THE MISTAKES THAT BROUGHT DEFEAT

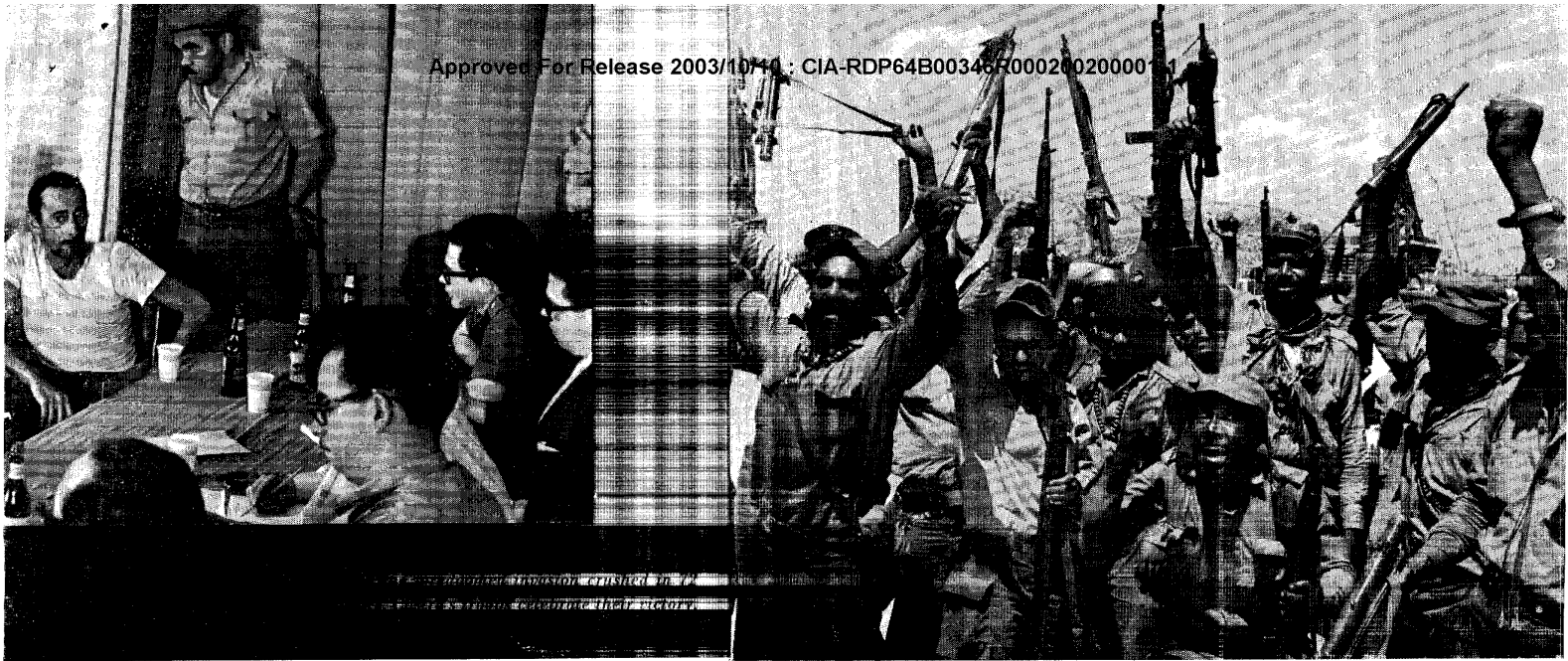
If the President had known the full and appalling truth in time, it now seems likely that he would have corrected some of the glaring errors—or perhaps countermanded the offensive. What were some of these major misjudgments?

Acting on its assumption that Cubans would rise against Castro as soon as the invasion began, the CIA decided to commit virtually the entire striking force in one place.

Worse yet, influenced by political considerations, the CIA eliminated the anti-Castro organizations inside Cuba from the operational picture. This destroyed the very machinery that might have brought about Castro's downfall.

At the same time, the CIA ignored President Kennedy's directives excluding *Batistianos*—followers of Dictator Fulgencio Batista, who was overthrown by Castro in 1959—from the "Liberation Army." As a result, after the failure of the invasion, Castro was able to present to his television audiences more than 100 captured members of the rebel force who were known Batista followers. The group included several former police agents with criminal records—men hated by most Cubans, pro-Castro or anti-Castro.

The tangled story of the invasion that failed began late in May,



1960, when anti-Castro forces in Cuba and in Florida set up the first centralized rebel organization—the Revolutionary Democratic Front.

The Movement of Revolutionary Recovery (MRR), which had been formed earlier by a group of onetime supporters of Castro, included some of his best military officers. They hoped to “salvage” the social and political revolution and to save it from the inroads of dictatorship and communism.

The MRR fighters excluded *Batistianos*, who had previously organized several anti-Castro factions in Miami. The most notorious of these was the private army of ex-Sen. Rolando Masferrer, who had made himself infamous during the Castro revolution by carrying out a brutal campaign of repression in Oriente province.

The MRR later joined with traditional Cuban political leaders in launching the Revolutionary Democratic Front. One member of the Front was Lt. Manuel Artime Buesa, 28, a former official in an Agrarian Reform Zone in Oriente under Castro. He was destined to be the man around whom much of the rebel tragedy revolved.

The Front was pledged to the goals of democratic social revolution, but it was, on the whole, a rather conservative group. Its political appeal inside revolution-conscious Cuba was severely limited. Nevertheless, it was the best Cuban group that could be found, and so by the middle of July, 1960, the Eisenhower Administration decided that it should serve as the nucleus of the “Liberation Army.”

The Front purchased or leased several isolated farms in Florida to use as training grounds for volunteers. Certain American and Cuban corporations with interests in Cuba contributed much of the money needed for these preparations.

Most of the rebels were taught parade-ground drill and the use of M-1 rifles, while Castro was giving his militia tough mountain training and receiving the first shipments of heavy Soviet arms.

Soon after Guatemala’s President Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes broke relations with the Castro regime, the U. S. Government worked out a secret agreement with him, authorizing establishment of bigger training camps on Guatemalan soil. Richard M. Bissell, a deputy of Dulles, took command of the increasingly elaborate operation at CIA headquarters in Washington. His chief field representative was Frank Bender, who had acquired guerrilla experience with the French underground during World War II.

Within 60 days after the U. S. took charge, Lieutenant Artime emerged as the favorite of the CIA planners. He had no military experience of any consequence, but his youth, his oratorical gifts and his political views—an odd blend of revolutionary slogans and basic conservatism—appealed to Bissell and Bender.

The initial plan worked out by the CIA and Artime bore no resemblance to the final operation. It called for creation of 30 guerrilla-and-sabotage groups inside Cuba, under orders to go into action at the moment rebel sea and air landings were made. Assaults by these units in 30 pre-selected areas were counted on to throw Cuba into such chaos and confusion that Castro would be unable to deploy his well-armed forces adequately to head off the invasion.

Already available in the Escambray Mountains of Cuba was an ill-armed but effective band of 200 or 300 anti-Castro fighters. These men—who might have been enlisted in the planned guerrilla-and-sabotage operation—had defied Castro for months. Castro had finally dislodged all the peasants in the area to prevent them from helping the guerrillas with food and weapons, and had set up roadblocks to halt the movement of supplies and volunteers to the hills.

POLITICS DESTROYS THE CUBAN UNDERGROUND

Here was a ready-to-fight anti-Castro force inside Cuba. All it needed from the CIA was food and weapons. But adequate aid never came. Why?

Survivors of this group who escaped to Florida said political considerations cost them CIA help. The Escambray commanders were reluctant to swear unquestioning allegiance to the Revolutionary Democratic Front. Therefore, they were seen as unwelcome rivals of the Miami group and left to fend for themselves until too late. Supplies were finally parachuted to them between December, 1960, and March, 1961, but by then the perimeter held by the underfed, inadequately armed guerrillas had shrunk perceptibly. The parachuted supplies fell into the hands of Castro’s militiamen, and the Escambray operation was doomed.

Even with the loss of the Escambray Mountain fighters, other effective underground groups were growing increasingly active in Cuba. The principal clandestine organization—People’s Revolutionary Movement—led by ex-Castro Minister of Public Works Manuel Ray, was attracting many prominent people.

Although the CIA knew of the Escambray Mountain guerrillas and the Cuban underground, it abandoned the initial plan to make use of these groups. The reasoning behind this change of plans is one of the fundamental mysteries of the whole Cuban undertaking. Two explanations have been given: political divisions in the anti-Castro forces, and the blind overconfidence of the CIA in the alternate single-landing plan which led to disaster.

While the neglected groups inside Cuba suffered from lack of supplies and direction, a deep division became apparent in the forces

continued

Castro agents in Miami were able to observe exactly what was happening

being trained by the CIA. Arttime, the leader favored by the CIA, edged closer and closer to right-wing groups. There were even reports that he had become involved with *Batistianos*—the worst crime in the Cuban revolutionary demonology. The CIA did not withdraw support from Arttime, however, and those who criticized the young leader—who now called himself Captain—soon found themselves squeezed out.

As the struggle for control continued, Manuel Ray came from Cuba, demanding recognition and support for his Cuban underground. Ray arrived in the U. S. with a clear political program calling for continuation of the social revolution in Cuba, but under democratic leadership. A smear campaign was unleashed in Florida to present him as a "dangerous leftist" and the proponent of "Fidelismo without Fidel." Right-wing Cuban politicians and businessmen, who were worried about their confiscated property, passed along the word about "this dangerous man Ray." The CIA field agents went along with the anti-Ray spokesmen. Ray found that his underground fighters would not share in the financial aid given to other anti-Castro groups, nor receive the weapons and explosives they needed.

Ray explained over and over that his group favored a democratic, anti-Communist Cuba, but that it was unrealistic to expect that the clock could be turned back on some of Castro's social reforms. The nation could not regress to the social and economic status of the Batista days, he argued. Even when he and his companions cited pronouncements of the United States Government expressing sympathy

for the pure goals of the Cuban social revolution, the response was shrugged shoulders.

Thus long before plans were ready to oust Premier Castro, a battle for the political future of Cuba was already raging in Miami hotel bars and rooms. The debate also divided men in the faraway training camps of the "Liberation Army." Because the CIA had power to offer or refuse aid to one or the other faction, the agency found itself in the position of a political arbiter.

It chose to back the right-wing groups.

This choice—which could influence the long-range foreign policy of the United States toward Cuba—was made without consulting the President or the State Department. With the decision to limit support to right-wing Cubans, the CIA assured the defeat of the planned anti-Castro invasion.

In Guatemala, the official policy of excluding *Batistianos* was never put into effect. Arttime gave the San Román brothers, former Batista officers, high commands. Other *Batistianos* were streaming into the camps. Now the CIA took the position that the *Batistianos* were experienced military men and proven anti-Communists and therefore should not be barred from the "Liberation Army."

About 200 of the anti-Castro troops in Guatemala rebelled against this reversal and were imprisoned by the right-wing command. Most of them were subsequently released and returned to Miami, but the CIA kept 17 of them under heavy guard on an isolated island in Guatemala until after the invasion.

Manuel Ray demanded that the *Batistianos* be weeded out of the anti-Castro army. He also asked for the full support of the Cuban underground. A representative of the Revolutionary Democratic Front signed a secret pact accepting Ray's conditions, and on March 20, the CIA-trained troops and the Cuban underground seemed ready to work

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together. Dr. José Miró Cardona, a candidate acceptable to both Ray and the Front, was named chairman of a joint Cuban Revolutionary Council, which promptly issued a general mobilization order. But under the surface appearance of order, confusion still prevailed.

In Miami, a team of top guerrilla leaders sat playing cards, working cross-word puzzles and wondering why they had not been enlisted in the impending attack. All were former captains in Castro's forces, and several had gone through the U. S. Army's Jungle Warfare School in Panama. Their request for boats and weapons to use in a landing in their native Oriente province had brought them such inadequate equipment that they had abandoned the projected mission as suicidal. (The radio they were offered did not work, and a 50-caliber machine gun issued to them did not fit its mount. The food supplies were totally inadequate. "Was somebody trying to send us to our death?" one of them asked incredulously.) Ignored by the CIA, they kept on playing cards.

In the last week of March, it was an open secret in Miami that the invasion was approaching and that somebody had decided on a one-thrust, do-or-die attack, despite the alarmed warnings of experts that the single landing would invite carnage and court disaster.

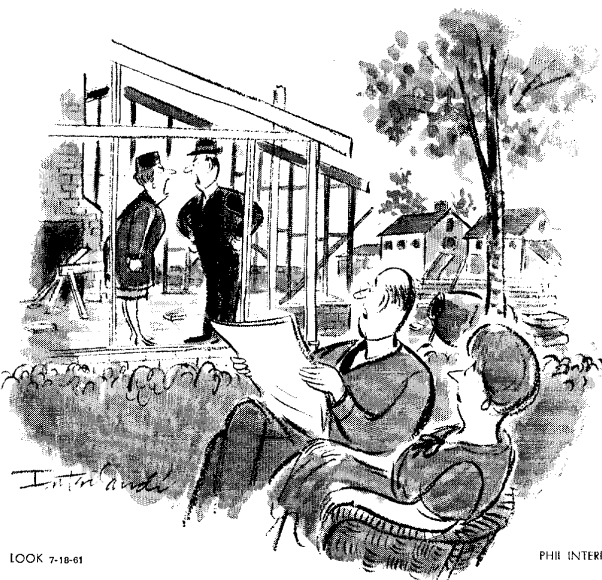
Recruits were assembled every evening at the general staff building in Coral Gables, issued khaki uniforms and driven to the deactivated Marine Corps air base at nearby Opa-locka. From there they were flown to Guatemala in unmarked U. S. Air Force transports.

Families and friends gathered to bid them farewell and press into their hands paper bags with sandwiches and cold chicken. There was feverish activity at the Front's headquarters on Biscayne Boulevard. Doctors and nurses were leaving for the field hospitals. The whole movement could not have been more obvious to the Castro agents if the rebel volunteers had marched down Flagler Street with drums and fifes, and signs proclaiming, "Guatemala, Here We Come."

In these final days of preparation, President Kennedy ordered the Immigration and Naturalization Service to arrest ex-Senator Masferrer. (After the invasion failed, Masferrer was released on bail pending a hearing.) CIA Director Dulles assured inquirers that all *Batistianos* had been weeded out. Unknown to him, such Batista officers as the San Román brothers were then reconfirmed in their commands.

Ten days before the invasion, Captain Artime was given the top command by the CIA, which failed to consult Manuel Ray on this vital decision. This violated the secret agreement, and Ray considered quitting the Revolutionary Council. But then, in the interest of unity,

continued



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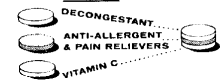
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PHOTOQUIZ ANSWERS

(See page 64) 1-H (Doris Day-Rock Hudson). 2-D (Gregory Peck-Audrey Hepburn). 3-J (Deborah Kerr-Burt Lancaster). 4-A (Elizabeth Taylor-Fernando Lamas). 5-C (Sophia Loren-William Holden). 6-F (Barbara Stanwyck-Gary Cooper). 7-I (Anthony Franciosa-Ava Gardner). 8-B (Grace Kelly-Cary Grant). 9-G (Jean Gabin-Brigitte Bardot). 10-E (Kim Hunter-Marlon Brando).

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THE EASY WAY

The underground "co-ordinator" heard of the invasion from the author

he told his followers to go to the Guatemala training camps.

His men, however, got only as far as a farm near the Bauer Drive on the outskirts of Miami. About 120 of them were placed under guard there by Front and CIA agents, along with a contingent of officers who had escaped from a Cuban prison in December. Inexplicably, they were prevented from going to Guatemala.

At this very late stage, Ray was still confident that the underground would be called upon to play a major role in the forthcoming attack, though he had not been told when the invasion would occur.

Oddly enough, the Ray underground began receiving explosives and weapons from the CIA in the last few weeks before the invasion. Consequently, it launched a major sabotage campaign designed to soften up the defenses of the Castro regime before the big assault. They set on fire the big Hershey sugar mill and burned the huge El Encanto department store in Havana and a wholesale house in Santiago.

The underground's plans—which, unbelievably, were not co-ordinated with the invasion plans—called for a concentrated sabotage campaign in the second week of April, with Havana power plants, major highways and railroads as the main targets.

The "National Co-ordinator" of the underground was smuggled out of Cuba and taken to New York for sessions with the Revolutionary Council. He was supplied with two tons of powerful C-4 plastic explosives and ordered back to Cuba. But neither he nor any other leader of the underground was told that the date for the invasion had already been set and that the invasion armada was being assembled in Puerto Cabezas in Nicaragua.

CASTRO'S "DESTROYED" AIR FORCE STRIKES

The U. S. Joint Chiefs of Staff had approved the idea of carrying out the landings on the swampy coast of Ciénaga de Zapata, in the elongated Bay of Pigs. But not a bridge was blown up nor a railroad line destroyed to prevent Castro from bringing forces swiftly to this invasion point. The CIA, with supreme confidence in its plan, and determined to keep out political groups it did not favor, had neglected to inform the Cuban underground of the date or place of the landing.

The underground "co-ordinator" was fast asleep in a modest Miami home when the news of the invasion came at dawn of April 17. His voice broke when he asked me on the telephone at 5 a.m., "Do you really mean that an invasion has started without us?" It had indeed. Since midnight, rebel soldiers in leopard-spot camouflage uniforms had been pouring ashore from five Liberty ships, chartered by dummy operators for the CIA and the Revolutionary Council.

At daybreak, C-54 and C-46 transport planes, flying from Guatemala and Nicaragua, began dropping paratroopers over the Bay of Pigs swamp. Eight or nine rebel B-26 bombers and obsolete P-51 fighters flew cover over the beachhead.

By midmorning, however, it became horribly clear how badly the invasion planners had miscalculated the entire project. The tiny Castro air force—which was supposed to have been destroyed on the ground two days earlier by Guatemala-based B-26's painted with Cuban insignia, or to have defected at the news of the invasion—quickly gained control of the air. That was the beginning of the end of the beachhead.

What the rebels had momentarily gained by the element of surprise was promptly lost by their inability to follow up their initial success. Before noon of April 17, the Castro aircraft had sunk the Liberty ship carrying all the communications equipment, the entire Fifth Battalion of the invasion force and stores of weapons. (These extra weapons had been brought for the guerrillas that the CIA expected to materialize in these remote marshes.)

In the first hours of combat, a rebel column had thrust almost 30 miles inland along a narrow road leading from the swamp toward the heartland of Cuba. But a battalion of Castro's well-trained militia from Cienfuegos was able to halt the surprised rebels long enough for

heavy reinforcements to swing into battle.

These reinforcements, including Soviet-made tanks and heavy guns carried on flatbed trucks, were able to reach the beachhead area swiftly, using highways that might have been cut by the underground. Lacking any advance information, the underground fighters did nothing. The equally bewildered civilian population was mystified. And so, it seems, were the invasion troops themselves.

Testimony by many of the prisoners indicated that the invaders fully expected sea-and-air support by United States forces. The original plan seemingly called for participation in the invasion by U. S. aircraft and Navy ships, but two weeks before the attack, President Kennedy resolved to let the Cubans go it alone. Cuban rebel soldiers were not told of the change in strategy, except for Kennedy's statement in a news conference several days before the attack that no American would become involved in the anti-Castro enterprise. (The five-ship armada, however, was escorted by two U. S. destroyers as far as Grand Cayman Island.) This was the final ingredient in the inevitable defeat.

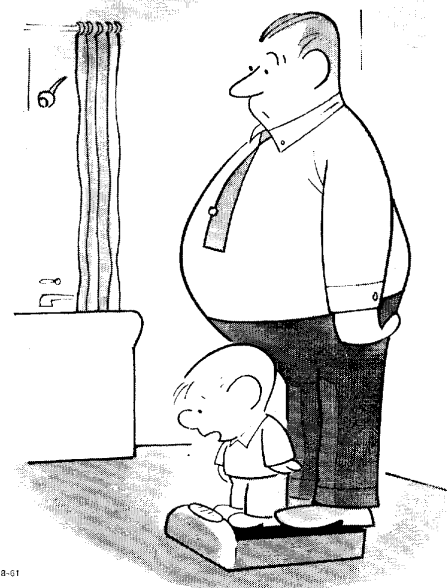
Even in the closing moments of this drama, the fantastic confusion that characterized the rebel undertaking from the moment of its inception was still apparent. Aboard a ship off the coast of Cuba, a rebel captain commanding a guerrilla force that was to land in his native Oriente province unbelievably read sealed orders instructing him to land in a province he hardly knew. He sailed away.

In a house near Miami, guarded by armed CIA agents, a virtually captive Cuban Revolutionary Council listened incredulously to radio newscasts narrating the tale of the disaster. An elderly man wept while staring at the duffel bag containing the field uniform he hoped to wear as he stepped ashore in Cuba to proclaim a rebel government.

In Caribbean waters all around Cuba, passing ships and yachts picked up exhausted and half-dead rebel infiltrators who had boarded small craft in Florida for commando landings to help a revolution that never had a chance.

In 72 hours, it was all over.

END



LOOK 7-10-61

HARRY MACE

"It says 298. Subtracting me makes it 257."